

Ag Secretary Protects Farmers, Environment

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As California's agriculture secretary, it is my duty to protect farmers and their crops from the damage that may be done by pests like the light brown apple moth, a recent arrival to our Central Coast and Bay Area regions. It is also my duty to protect California's environment, and this pest is a bona fide threat to hundreds of native plant species. On those grounds alone -- even if there is never a single dollar's worth of damage done to California's crops -- we should eradicate this infestation while it is still possible to do so.

The moth is the latest invader to capture our attention, and there is no shortage of good reasons to eradicate this dangerous pest from California. It is among the most serious new threats to our food supply and environment we have seen in decades, so our trading partners are taking drastic actions. Canada and Mexico recently ratcheted up quarantines. These two countries are among our leading trading partners, ranking second and fifth, respectively, among our agricultural export destinations -- combining to claim a \$2.4 billion slice of our state's \$9.6 billion in California's agricultural exports. Make no mistake -- these restrictions are going to have a lasting impact on growers, on their workers and suppliers, on their crops and on our communities.

Because of the appearance of the moth here, Canada and Mexico have tightened the screws on hundreds of California growers who export their crops, making it more costly, more labor intensive and more time-consuming to prove their crops are "free from" the moth and qualified for export. Even though Mexico has recently rolled back some of its newer restrictions, the threat of increased costs to our agricultural producers remains...

A common question is "What if you don't eradicate?" There is a misconception circulating on the Internet and elsewhere that this is a paper pest, that maybe, just maybe, no damage would occur if we just turned our backs and hoped for the best. "Let nature take care of herself," the argument goes.

Unfortunately, it wasn't nature that brought the moth here -- it very likely was people bringing plants into the state without the proper inspection and clearance...

Quarantines like those imposed by Canada and Mexico are the most obvious consequence of failing to eradicate, but it is important to also consider the additional pesticides that will be used far into the future by farmers, homeowners, landscapers and others who will be motivated to protect their crops, yards and gardens. Eradicating this pest is as much an environmental imperative as it is an act of agricultural protection.

So, what can we do about this infestation? Fortunately, we have an innovative solution that satisfies the dual requirements of being both effective and environmentally benign. Pheromones are that solution. Unlike chemical pesticides, pheromones do not kill or even harm anything -- not even the moths. They simply distract the male moths so they cannot find a mate, causing the colony to collapse from a lack of breeding.

For years, the environmental community has demanded that agriculture move toward such sustainable, cutting-edge tools that provide safer alternatives to chemical pesticides. While conventional insecticides kill pests on contact or by ingestion, pheromone products are inherently safer because they do no harm to the insect. Pheromones merely distract the male moths so they can't find a female, and reproduction is curtailed. We can't sense or detect them, but these pheromones are all around us every day, emitted by the moth as well as native moths and butterflies in our environment.

I am proud to be able to offer this progressive, alternative approach to eradicating the light brown apple moth, and I trust that once the facts are understood, Californians will support this forward-thinking approach to protecting the Golden State's diverse resources.

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